

EUGENE O'NEILL

THE
EMPEROR
JONES

STUDENTS' EDITION





APPLETON MODERN PLAYS

Edited by Frank Shay

THE EMPEROR JONES



EUGENE O'NEILL

THE EMPEROR JONES

WITH A STUDY GUIDE FOR THE
SCREEN VERSION OF THE PLAY

BY

WILLIAM LEWIN
MAX J. HERZBERG



STUDENTS' EDITION

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FOREWORD

Aside from the numerous other values that it possesses, *The Emperor Jones* may be studied with particular profit from the point of view of the changes that it became necessary to make when the stage version was transformed into a screen version. A number of the questions presented in the lesson plan, it will be noted, have been framed with particular reference to this transformation.

O'Neill's original play was in itself one out of the ordinary in that the theme was presented in a series of scenes or episodes rather than in the conventional three-act or five-act dramatic development. The action was flashed upon the eye in a succession of pictures, with dialogue accompaniment, and in many of the scenes there was an element of the symbolic or representative.

This peculiarity of the stage version made it decidedly easier to prepare the screen version. One might almost say that O'Neill had a prescience of the ultimate screen version, and that he was preparing the way for it. It is said that the famous dramatist himself prepares screen continuities for all his plays, but that hitherto none of these has been used. When the screen version for *The Emperor Jones* was prepared by DuBose Heyward, he submitted it to O'Neill, and the latter discovered that in many details it corresponded to the version he himself had had in mind.

MAX J. HERZBERG.

THE EMPEROR JONES

CHARACTERS

objective {
BRUTUS JONES, *Emperor*
HENRY SMITHERS, *a Cockney trader*
AN OLD NATIVE WOMAN
LEM, A NATIVE CHIEF
SOLDIERS, ADHERENTS OF SUN

subjective {
THE LITTLE FORMLESS FEARS
JEFF
THE NEGRO CONVICTS
THE PRISON GUARD
THE PLANTERS
THE AUCTIONEER
THE SLAVES
THE CONGO WITCH DOCTOR
THE CROCODILE GOD

The action of the play takes place on an island in the West Indies, as yet un-self-determined by white marines. The form of native government is, for the time being, an Empire.

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SCENE ONE

The audience chamber in the palace of the Emperor—a spacious, high-ceilinged room with bare, white-washed walls. The floor is of white tiles. In the rear, to the left of center, a wide archway giving out on a portico with white pillars. The palace is evidently situated on high ground, for beyond the portico nothing can be seen but a vista of distant hills, their summits crowned with thick groves of palm trees. In the right wall, center, a smaller arched doorway leading to the living quarters of the palace. The room is bare of furniture with the exception of one huge chair, made of uncut wood, which stands at center, its back to rear. This is very apparently the Emperor's throne. It is painted a dazzling, eye-smiting scarlet. There is a brilliant orange cushion on the seat and another smaller one is placed on the floor to serve as a footstool. Strips of matting, dyed scarlet, lead from the foot of the throne to the two entrances.

It is late afternoon, but the sunlight still blazes yellowly beyond the portico, and there is an oppressive burden of exhausting heat in the air. As the curtain rises a native negro woman sneaks in cautiously from the entrance on the right. She is very old, dressed in cheap calico, bare-footed, a red bandana handkerchief covering all

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but a few stray wisps of white hair. A bundle bound in colored cloth is carried over her shoulder on the end of a stick. She hesitates beside the doorway, peering back as if in extreme dread of being discovered. Then she begins to glide noiselessly, a step at a time, toward the doorway in the rear. At this moment Smithers appears beneath the portico.

Smithers is a tall, stoop-shouldered man about forty. His bald head, perched on a long neck with an enormous Adam's apple, looks like an egg. The tropics have tanned his naturally pasty face with its small, sharp features to a sickly yellow, and native rum has painted his pointed nose to a startling red. His little washy-blue eyes are red-rimmed, and dart about like a ferret's. His expression is one of unscrupulous meanness, cowardly and dangerous. His attitude toward Jones is that of one who will give vent to a nourished grudge against all superiority—as far as he dares. He is dressed in a worn riding suit of dirty white drill, puttees, spurs, and wears a white cork helmet. A cartridge belt with an automatic revolver is around his waist. He carries a riding whip in his hand. He sees the woman and stops to watch her suspiciously. Then, making up his mind, he steps quickly on tiptoe into the room. The woman, looking back over her shoulder continually, does not see him until it is too late. When she does, Smithers springs forward and grabs her firmly by the shoulder. She struggles to get away, fiercely but silently.

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SMITHERS (*tightening his grasp—roughly*)

Easy! None o' that, me birdie. You can't wriggle out now. I got me 'ooks on yer.

WOMAN (*seeing the uselessness of struggling, gives away to frantic terror and sinks to the ground, embracing his knees supplicatingly*).

No tell him! No tell him, Mister!

SMITHERS (*with great curiosity*)

Tell 'im (*Then scornfully*) Oh, you mean 'is bloomin' Majesty. What's the gaime, any 'ow? What are you sneakin' away for? Been stealin' a bit, I s'pose. (*He taps her bundle with his riding whip significantly.*)

WOMAN (*shaking her head vehemently*)

No, me no steal.

SMITHERS

Bloody liar! But tell me what's up. There's somethin' funny goin' on. I smelled it in the air first thing I got up this mornin'. You blacks are up to some devilment. This palace of 'is is like a bleedin' tomb. Where's all the 'ands? (*The woman keeps sullenly silent. Smithers raises his whip threateningly.*) Ow, yer won't, won't yer? I'll show yer what's what.

WOMAN (*coweringly*)

I tell, Mister. You no hit. They go—all go. (*She makes a sweeping gesture toward the hills in the distance.*)

SMITHERS

Run away—to the 'ills?

WOMAN

Yes, Mister. Him Emperor—Great Father—

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(She touches her forehead to the floor with a quick, mechanical jerk.) Him sleep after eat. Then they go—all go. Me old woman. Me left only. Now me go, too.

SMITHERS *(his astonishment giving way to an immense mean satisfaction)*

Ow! So that's the ticket! Well, I know bloody well wot's in the air—when they runs orf to the 'ills. The tom-tom 'll be thumping out there bloomin' soon. *(With extreme vindictiveness)* And I'm bloody glad of it, for one! Serve 'im right! Puttin' on airs, the stinkin' nigger! 'Is Majesty! Gawd blimey! I only 'opes I'm there when they takes 'im out to shoot 'im. *(Suddenly)* 'E's still 'ere all right, ain't 'e?

WOMAN

Yes. Him sleep.

SMITHERS

'E's bound to find out soon as 'e wakes up. 'E's cunnin' enough to know when 'is time's come. *(He goes to the doorway on right and whistles shrilly with his fingers in his mouth. The old woman springs to her feet and runs out of the doorway, rear. Smithers goes after her, reaching for his revolver.)* Stop or I'll shoot! *(Then stopping indifferently.)* Pop orf, then, if yer like, yer black cow! *(He stands in the doorway, looking after her.)*

(Jones enters from the right. He is a tall, powerfully-built, full-blooded negro of middle age. His features are typically negroid, yet there is something

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decidedly distinctive about his face—an underlying strength of will, a hardy, self-reliant confidence in himself that inspires respect. His eyes are alive with a keen, cunning intelligence. In manner he is shrewd, suspicious, evasive. He wears a light-blue uniform coat, sprayed with brass buttons, heavy gold chevrons on his shoulders, gold braid on the collar, cuffs, etc. His pants are bright red, with a light-blue stripe down the side. Patent leather laced boots with brass spurs, and a belt with a long-barreled, pearl-handled revolver in a holster, complete his make-up. Yet there is something not altogether ridiculous about his grandeur. He has a way of carrying it off.)

JONES (*not seeing anyone—greatly irritated and blinking sleepily—shouts*)

Who dare whistle dat way in my palace? Who dare wake up de Emperor? I'll git de hide frayled off some o' you niggers sho'!

SMITHERS (*showing himself—in a manner half-afraid and half-defiant*)

It was me whistled to yer. (*As Jones frowns angrily.*) I got news for yer.

JONES (*putting on his suavest manner, which fails to cover up his contempt for the white man*)

Oh, it's you, Mister Smithers. (*He sits down on his throne with easy dignity.*) What news you got to tell me?

SMITHERS (*coming close to enjoy his discomfiture*)

Don't you notice nothin' funny to-day?

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JONES (*coldly*)

Funny? No, I ain't perceived nothin' of de kind!

SMITHERS

Then you ain't so foxy as I thought you was. Where's all your court? (*Sarcastically*) the Generals and the Cabinet Ministers and all?

JONES (*imperturbably*)

Where dey mostly runs to minute I closes my eyes—drinkin' rum and talkin' big down in de town. (*Sarcastically*) How come you don't know dat? Ain't you sousin' with 'em most every day?

SMITHERS (*stung, but pretending indifference—with a wink*)

That's part of the day's work. I got ter—ain't I—in my business?

JONES (*contemptuously*)

Yo' business!

SMITHERS (*imprudently enraged*)

Gawd blimey, you was glad enough for me ter take you in on it when you landed here first. You didn' 'ave no 'igh and mighty airs in them days!

JONES (*his hand going to his revolver like a flash—menacingly*)

Talk polite, white man! Talk polite, you heah me! I'm boss heah now, is you forgettin'? (*The Cockney seems about to challenge this last statement with the facts, but something in the other's eyes holds and cows him.*)

SMITHERS (*in a cowardly whine*)

No 'arm meant, old top.

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JONES (*condescendingly*)

I accepts yo' apology. (*Lets his hand fall from his revolver.*) No use'n you rakin' up ole times. What I was den is one thing. What I is now's another. You didn't let me in on yo' crooked work out o' no kind feelin' dat time. I done de dirty work fo' you—and most o' de brain work, too, fo' dat matter—and I was wu'th money to you, dat's de reason.

SMITHERS

Well, blimey, I give yer a start, didn't I—when no one else would. I wasn't afraid to hire yer like the rest was—'count of the story about your breakin' jail back in the States.

JONES

No, you didn't have no s'cuse to look down on me fo' dat. You been in jail yo'self more'n once.

SMITHERS (*furiously*)

It's a lie! (*Then trying to pass it off by an attempt at scorn*) Garn! Who told yer that fairy tale?

JONES

Dey's some things I ain't got to be tole. I kin see 'em in folks eyes. (*Then after a pause—meditatively*) Yes, you sho' give me a start. And it didn't take long from dat time to git dese fool woods' niggers right where I wanted dem. (*With pride*) From stowaway to Emperor in two years! Dat's goin' some!

SMITHERS (*with curiosity*)

And I bet you got er pile o' money 'id safe someplace.

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JONES (*with satisfaction*)

I sho' has! And it's in a foreign bank where no pusson don't ever get it out but me, no matter what come. You don't s'pose I was holdin' down dis Emperor job for de glory in it, did you? Sho'! De fuss and glory part of it, dat's only to turn de heads o' de low-flung bush niggers dat's here. Dey wants de big circus show for deir money. I gives it to 'em an' I gits de money. (*With a grin.*) De long green, dat's me every time! (*Then rebukingly*) But you ain't got no kick agin me, Smithers. I'se paid you back all you done for me many times. Ain't I pertected you and winked at all de crooked tradin' you been doin' right out in de broad day? Sho' I has—and me makin' laws to stop it at de same time! (*He chuckles.*)

SMITHERS (*grinning*)

But, meanin' no 'arm, you been grabbin' right and left yourself, ain't you? Look at the taxes you've put on 'em! Blimey! You've squeezed 'em dry

JONES (*chuckling*)

No dey ain't *all* dry yet. I'se still heah, ain't I?

SMITHERS (*smiling at his secret thought*)

They're dry right now, you'll find out. (*Changing the subject abruptly*) And as for me breaking laws, you've broke 'em all yerself just as fast as yer made 'em.

JONES

Ain't I de Emperor? De laws don't go for him. (*Judiciously*) You heah what I tells you,

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Smithers. Dere's little stealin' like you does, and dere's big stealin' like I does. For de little stealin' dey gits you in jail soon or late. For de big stealin' dey makes you Emperor and puts you in de Hall o' Fame when you croaks. (*Reminiscently*) If dey's one thing I learns in ten years on de Pullman ca's listenin' to de white quality talk, it's dat same fact. And when I gits a chance to use it I winds up Emperor in two years.

SMITHERS (*unable to repress the genuine admiration of the small fry for the large*)

Yes, you turned the bleedin' trick, all right. Blimey, I never seen a bloke 'as 'ad the bloomin' luck you 'as.

JONES (*severely*)

Luck? What you mean—luck?

SMITHERS

I suppose you'll say as that swank about the silver bullet ain't luck—and that was what first got the fool blacks on yer side the time of the revolution, wasn't it?

JONES (*with a laugh*)

Oh, dat silver bullet! Sho' was luck! But I makes dat luck, you heah? I loads de dice! Yessuh! When dat murderin' nigger ole Lem hired to kill me takes aim ten feet away and his gun misses fire and I shoots him dead, what you heah me say?

SMITHERS

You said yer'd got a charm so's no lead bullet 'd kill yer. You was so strong only a silver bullet

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could kill yer, you told 'em. Blimey, wasn't that swank for yer—and plain, fat-'eaded luck?

JONES (*proudly*)

I got brains and I uses 'em quick. Dat ain't luck.

SMITHERS

Yer knew they wasn't 'ardly liable to get no silver bullets. And it was luck 'e didn't 'it you that time.

JONES (*laughing*)

And dere all dem fool bush niggers was kneelin' down and bumpin' deir heads on de ground like I was a miracle out o' de Bible. Oh, Lawd, from dat time on I has dem all eatin' out of my hand. I cracks de whip and dey jumps through.

SMITHERS (*with a sniff*)

Yankee bluff done it.

JONES

Ain't a man's talkin' big what makes him big—long as he makes folks believe it. Sho' I talks large when I ain't got nothin' to back it up, but I ain't talkin' wild just de same. I knows I kin fool 'em—I *knows* it—and dat's backin' enough fo' my game. And ain't I got to learn deir lingo and teach some of dem English befo' I kin talk to 'em? Ain't dat wuk? You ain't never learned ary word er it, Smithers, in de ten years you been heah, dough yo' knows it's money in yo' pocket tradin' wid 'em if you does. But yo' too shiftless to take de trouble.

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SMITHERS (*flushing*)

Never mind about me. What's this I've 'eard about yer really 'avin' a silver bullet moulded for yourself?

JONES

It's playin' out my bluff. I has de silver bullet moulded and I tells 'em when de time comes I kills myself wid it. I tells 'em dat's 'cause I'm de on'y man in de world big enuff to git me. No use'n deir tryin'. And dey falls down and bumps deir heads. (*He laughs.*) I does dat so's I kin take a walk in peace widout no jealous nigger gunnin' at me from behind de trees.

SMITHERS (*astonished*)

Then you 'ad it made—'onest?

JONES

Sho' did. Heah she be. (*He takes out his revolver, breaks it, and takes the silver bullet out of one chamber.*) Five lead an' dis silver baby at de last. Don't she shine pretty? (*He holds it in his hand, looking at it admiringly, as if strangely fascinated.*)

SMITHERS

Let me see. (*Reaches out his hand for it.*)

JONES (*harshly*)

Keep yo' hands whar dey b'long, white man. (*He replaces it in the chamber and puts the revolver back on his hip.*)

SMITHERS (*snarling*)

Gawd blimey! Think I'm a bleedin' thief, you would.

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JONES

No. 'Tain't dat. I knows you'se scared to steal from me. On'y I ain't 'lowin' nary body to touch dis baby. She's my rabbit's foot.

SMITHERS (*sneering*)

A bloomin' charm, wot? (*Venomously*) Well, you'll need all the bloody charms you 'as before long, s' 'elp me!

JONES (*judicially*)

Oh, I'se good for six months yit 'fore dey gits sick o' my game. Den, when I sees trouble comin', I makes my get-a-way.

SMITHERS

Ho! You got it all planned, ain't yer?

JONES

I ain't no fool. I knows dis Emperor's time is sho't. Dat why I make hay when de sun shine. Was you thinkin' I'se aimin' to hold down dis job for life? No, suh! What good is gittin' money if you stays back in dis raggedy country? I wants action when I spends. And when I sees dese niggers gittin' up deir nerve to tu'n me out, and I'se got all de money in sight, I resigns on de spot and beats it quick.

SMITHERS

Where to?

JONES

None o' yo' business.

SMITHERS

Not back to the bloody States, I'll lay my oath.

JONES (*suspiciously*)

Why don't I? (*Then with an easy laugh*) You

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mean 'count of dat story 'bout me breakin' from jail back dere? Dat's all talk.

SMITHERS (*skeptically*)

Ho, yes!

JONES (*sharply*)

You ain't 'sinuatin' I'se a liar, is you?

SMITHERS (*hastily*)

No, Gawd strike me! I was only thinkin' o' the bloody lies you told the blacks 'ere about killin' white men in the States.

JONES (*angered*)

How come dey're lies?

SMITHERS

You'd 'ave been in jail if you 'ad, wouldn't yer then? (*With venom*) And from what I've 'eard, it ain't 'ealthy for a black to kill a white man in the States. They burn 'em in oil, don't they?

JONES (*with cool deadliness*)

You mean lynchin' 'd scare me? Well, I tells you, Smithers, maybe I does kill one white man back dere. Maybe I does. And maybe I kills another right heah 'fore long if he don't look out.

SMITHERS (*trying to force a laugh*)

I was on'y spoofin' yer. Can't yer take a joke? And you was just sayin' you'd never been in jail.

JONES (*in the same tone—slightly boastful*)

Maybe I goes to jail dere for gettin' in an argument wid razors ovah a crap game. Maybe I gits twenty years when dat colored man die. Maybe I gits in 'nother argument wid de prison guard who was overseer ovah us when

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we're walkin' de roads. Maybe he hits me wid a whip an' I splits his head wid a shovel an' runs away an' files de chain off my leg an' gits away safe. Maybe I does all dat an' maybe I don't. It's a story I tells you so's you knows I'se de kind of man dat if you evah repeats one word of it, I ends yo' stealin' on dis yearth mighty damn quick!

SMITHERS (*terrified*)

Think I'd peach on yer? Not me! Ain't I always been yer friend?

JONES (*suddenly relaxing*)

Sho' you has—and you better be.

SMITHERS (*recovering his composure—and with it his malice*)

And just to show yer I'm yer friend, I'll tell yer that bit o' news I was goin' to.

JONES

Go ahead! Shoot de piece. Must be bad news from de happy way you look.

SMITHERS (*warningly*)

Maybe it's gettin' time for you to resign—with that bloomin' silver bullet, wot? (*He finishes with a mocking grin.*)

JONES (*puzzled*)

What's dat you say? Talk plain.

SMITHERS

Ain't noticed any of the guards or servants about the place to-day, I 'aven't.

JONES (*carelessly*)

Dey're all out in de garden sleepin' under de trees. When I sleeps, dey sneaks a sleep, too,

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and I pretends I never suspicions it. All I got to do is to ring de bell an' dey come flyin', makin' a bluff dey was wukin' all de time.

SMITHERS (*in the same mocking tone*)

Ring the bell now an' you'll bloody well see what I means.

JONES (*startled to alertness, but preserving the same careless tone*)

Sho' I rings. (*He reaches below the throne and pulls out a big common dinner bell which is painted the same vivid scarlet as the throne. He rings this vigorously—then stops to listen. Then he goes to both doors, rings again, and looks out.*)

SMITHERS (*watching him with malicious satisfaction—after a pause—mockingly*)

The bloody ship is sinkin' an' the bleedin' rats 'as slung their 'ooks.

JONES (*in a sudden fit of anger flings the bell clatteringly into a corner*)

Low-flung, woods niggers! (*Then catching Smithers' eye on him, he controls himself and suddenly bursts into a low, chuckling laugh.*)

Reckon I overplays my hand dis once! A man can't take de pot on a bob-tailed flush all de time. Was I sayin' I'd sit in six months mo'? Well, I'se changed my mind, den. I cashes in and resigns de job of Emperor right dis minute.

SMITHERS (*with real admiration*)

Blimey, but you're a cool bird, and no mistake.

JONES

No use'n fussin'. When I knows de game's up

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I kisses it good-bye widout no long waits.
Dey've all run off to de hills, ain't dey?

SMITHERS

Yes—every bleedin' manjack of 'em.

JONES

Den de revolution is at de post. And de Emperor better git his feet smokin' up de trail.
(He starts for the door in rear.)

SMITHERS

Goin' out to look for your 'orse? Yer won't find any. They steals the 'orses first thing. Mine was gone when I went for 'im this mornin'. That's wot first give me a suspicion of wot was up.

JONES *(alarmed for a second, scratches his head, then philosophically)*

Well, den I hoofs it. Feet, do yo' duty! *(He pulls out a gold watch and looks at it.)* Three-thuty. Sundown's at six-thuty or dereabouts. *(Puts his watch back—with cool confidence.)* I got plenty o' time to make it easy.

SMITHERS

Don't be so bloomin' sure of it. They'll be after you 'ot and 'eavy. Ole Lem is at the bottom o' this business an' 'e 'ates you like 'ell. 'E'd rather do for you than eat 'is dinner, 'e would!

JONES *(scornfully)*

Dat fool no-count nigger! Does you think I'se scared o' him? I stands him on his thick head more'n once befo' dis, and I does it again if he come in my way—*(fiercely)*. And dis time I leave him a dead nigger fo' sho'!

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SMITHERS

You'll 'ave to cut through the big forest—an' these blacks 'ere can sniff and follow a trail in the dark like 'ounds. You'd 'ave to 'ustle to get through that forest in twelve hours even if you knew all the bloomin' trails like a native.

JONES (*with indignant scorn*)

Look-a-heah, white man! Does you think I'm a natural bo'n fool? Give me credit fo' havin' some sense, fo' Lawd's sake! Don't you s'pose I'se looked ahead and made sho' of all de chances? I'se gone out in dat big forest, pretendin' to hunt so many times dat I knows it high an' low like a book. I could go through on dem trails wid my eyes shut. (*With great contempt*) Think dese ig'nerent bush niggers dat ain't got brains enuff to know deir own names even can catch Brutus Jones? Huh! I s'pects not! Not on yo' life! Why, man, de white men went after me wid bloodhounds where I come from an' I jes' laughs at 'em. It's a shame to fool dese black trash around heah, dey're so easy. You watch me, man. I'll make dem look sick, I will. I'll be 'cross de plain to de edge of de forest by time dark comes. Once in de woods in de night, dey got a swell chance o' findin' dis baby! Dawn tomorrow I'll be out at de oder side and on de coast whar dat French gunboat is stayin'. She picks me up, take me to the Martinique when she go dar, and dere I is safe wid a mighty big bankroll in my jeans. It's easy as rollin' off a log.

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SMITHERS (*maliciously*)

But s'posin' somethin' 'appens wrong an' they do nab yer?

JONES (*decisively*)

Dey don't. Dat's de answer.

SMITHERS

But just for argyment's sake—what'd you do?

JONES (*frowning*)

I'se got five lead bullets in dis gun good enuff fo' common bush niggers—an' after dat I got de silver bullet left to cheat 'em out o' gittin' me.

SMITHERS (*jeeringly*)

Ho, I was fergettin' that silver bullet. You'll bump yourself orf in style, won't yer? Blimey!

JONES (*gloomily*)

Yo' kin bet yo' whole roll on one thing, white man. Dis baby plays out his string to de end and when he quits, he quits wid a bang de way he ought. Silver bullet ain't none too good for him when he go, dat's a fac'! (*Then shaking off his nervousness—with a confident laugh*) Sho'! What is I talkin' about? Ain't come to dat yit an' I never will—not wid trash niggers like dese yere. (*Boastfully*) Silver bullet bring me luck, anyway. I kin outguess, outrun, outfight, an' outplay de whole lot o' dem all ovah de board any time o' de day er night! Yo' watch me!

(From the distant hills comes the faint, steady thump of a tom-tom, low and vibrating. It starts at a rate exactly corresponding to normal pulse-

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beat—72 to the minute—and continues at a gradually accelerating rate from this point uninterruptedly to the very end of the play.)

Jones starts at the sound; a strange look of apprehension creeps into his face for a moment as he listens. Then he asks, with an attempt to regain his most casual manner:)

What's dat drum beatin' fo'?

SMITHERS (*with a mean grin*)

For you. That means the bleedin' ceremony 'as started. I've 'eard it before and I knows.

JONES

Cer'mony? What cer'mony?

SMITHERS

The blacks is 'oldin' a bloody meetin', 'avin' a war dance, gettin' their courage worked up b'fore they starts after you.

JONES

Let dem! Dey'll sho' need it!

SMITHERS

And they're there 'oldin' their 'eathen religious service—makin' no end of devil spells and charms to 'elp 'em against your silver bullet. (*He guffaws loudly.*) Blimey, but they're balmy as 'ell.

JONES (*a tiny bit awed and shaken in spite of himself*)

Huh! Takes more'n dat to scare dis chicken!

SMITHERS (*scenting the other's feeling—maliciously*)

Ternight when it's pitch black in the forest, they'll 'ave their pet devils and ghosts 'oundin'

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after you. You'll find yer bloody 'air 'll be standin' on end before to-morrow mornin'. (*Seriously*) It's a bleedin' queer place, that stinkin' forest, even in daylight. Yer don't know what might 'appen in there, it's that rotten still. Always sends the cold shivers down my back minute I gets in it.

JONES (*with a contemptuous sniff*)

I ain't no chicken-liver like you is. Trees an' me, we's friends, an' dar's a full moon comin' bring me light. And let dem po' niggers make all de fool spells dey'se a min' to. Does yo' s'pect I'se silly enuff to b'lieve in ghosts an' ha'nts an' all dat ole woman's talk? G'long, white man! You ain't talkin' to me. (*With a chuckle*) Doesn't you knows dey's got to do wid a man who was member in good standin' o' de Baptist Church. Sho' I was dat when I was porter on de Pullman, an' befo' I gits into my little trouble. Let dem try deir heathen tricks. De Baptist Church done pertect me an' land dem all in hell. (*Then with more confident satisfaction*) An' I'se got little silver bullet o' my own, don't forgit.

SMITHERS

Ho! You 'aven't give much 'eed to your Baptist Church since you been down 'ere. I've 'eard myself and 'ad turned yer coat an' was takin' up with their blarsted witch-doctors, or whatever the 'ell yer calls the swine.

JONES (*vehemently*)

I pretends to! Sho' I pretends! Dat's part o'

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my game from de fust. If I finds out dem niggers believes dat black is white, den I yells it out louder 'n deir loudest. It don't git me nothin' to do missionary work for de Baptist Church. I'se after de coin, an' I lays my Jesus on de shelf for de time bein'. (*Stops abruptly to look at his watch—alertly.*) But I ain't got de time to waste no mo'e fool talk wid you. I'se gwine away from heah dis secon'. (*He reaches in under the throne and pulls out an expensive Panama hat with a bright multi-colored band and sets it jauntily on his head.*) So long, white man! (*With a grin*) See you n jail some time, maybe!

SMITHERS

Not me, you won't. Well, I wouldn't be in yer bloody boots for no bloomin' money, but 'ere's wishin' yer luck just the same.

JONES (*contemptuously*)

You're de frightenedest man evah I see! I tells you I'se safe 's'f I was in New York City. It take dem niggers from now to dark to git up de nerve to start somethin'. By dat time I'se got a head start dey never kotch up wid.

SMITHERS (*maliciously*)

Give my regards to any ghosts yer meets up with.

JONES (*grinning*)

If dat ghost got money, I'll tell him never ha'nt you less'n he wants to lose it.

SMITHERS (*flattered*)

Garn! (*Then curiously*) Ain't yer takin' no luggage with yer?

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JONES

I travels light when I wants to move fast. And I got tinned grub buried on de edge o' de forest. (*Boastfully*) Now say dat I don't look ahead an' use my brains! (*With a wide, liberal gesture*) I will all dat's left in de palace to you an' you better grab all you kin sneak away wid befo' dey gits here.

SMITHERS (*gratefully*)

Righto—and thanks ter yer. (*As Jones walks toward the door in rear—cautioningly*) Say! Look 'ere, you ain't goin' out that way, are yer?

JONES

Does you think I'd slink out de back door like a common nigger? I'se Emperor yit, ain't I? And de Emperor Jones leaves de way he comes, and dat black trash don't dare stop him—not yit, leastways. (*He stops for a moment in the doorway, listening to the far-off but insistent beat of the tom-tom.*) Listen to dat roll-call, will yo'? Must be mighty big drum carry dat far. (*Then with a laugh*) Well, if dey ain't no whole brass band to see me off, I sho' got de drum part of it. So long, white man. (*He puts his hands in his pockets and with studied carelessness, whistling a tune, he saunters out of the doorway and off to the left.*)

SMITHERS (*looks after him with a puzzled admiration*)

'E's got 'is bloomin' nerve with 'im, s'elp me! (*Then angrily*) Ho—the bleedin' nigger—puttin' on 'is bloody airs! I 'opes thev nabs 'im an'

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gives 'im what's what! (*Then putting business before the pleasure of his thought, looking around him with cupidity.*) A bloke ought to find a 'ole lot in this palace that 'd go for a bit of cash. Let's take a look, 'Arry, me lad. (*He starts for the doorway on right as*)

The Curtain Falls

SCENE TWO: NIGHTFALL

(*The end of the plain where the Great Forest begins. The foreground is sandy, level ground, dotted by a few stones and clumps of stunted bushes cowering close against the earth to escape the buffeting of the trade wind. In the rear the forest is a wall of darkness dividing the world. Only when the eye becomes accustomed to the gloom can the outlines of separate trunks of the nearest trees be made out, enormous pillars of deeper blackness. A somber monotone of wind lost in the leaves moans in the air. Yet this sound serves but to intensify the impression of the forest's relentless immobility, to form a background throwing into relief its brooding, implacable silence.*)

(*Jones enters from the left, walking rapidly. He stops as he nears the edge of the forest, looks around him quickly, peering into the dark as if searching for some familiar landmark. Then,*

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apparently satisfied that he is where he ought to be, he throws himself on the ground, dog-tired.)

Well, heah I is. In de nick o' time, too! Little mo' an' it'd be blacker'n de ace of spades heahabouts. *(He pulls a bandana handkerchief from his hip pocket and mops off his perspiring face.)* Sho! Gimme air! I'se tuckered out sho' 'nuf. Dat soft Emperor job ain't no trainin' fo' a long hike ovah dat plain in de brilin' sun *(Then with a chuckle)* Cheah up, nigger, der worst is yet to come. *(He lifts his head and stares at the forest. His chuckle peters out abruptly. In a tone of awe):* My goodness, look at dem woods, will you? Dat no-count Smithers said dey'd be black an' he sho' called de turn. *(Turning away from them quickly, and looking down at his feet, he snatches at a chance to change the subject—solicitously:)* Feet, yo' is holdin' up yo' end fine an' I sutinly hopes you ain't blisterin' none. It's time you git a rest. *(He takes off his shoes, his eyes studiously avoiding the forest. He feels of the soles of his feet gingerly.)* You is still in de pink—only a little mite feverish. Cool you' self. Remember yo' done got a long journey yit befo' yo'. *(He sits in a weary attitude, listening to the rhythmic beating of the tom-tom. He grumbles in a loud tone to cover up a growing uneasiness.)* Bush niggers! Wonder dey wouldn't git sick o' beatin' dat drum. Sound louder, seem like. I wonder if dey's startin' after me? *(He scram-*

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bles to his feet, looking back across the plain.) Couldn't see dem now, nohow, if dey was hundred feet away. *(Then shaking himself like a wet dog to get rid of these depressing thoughts.)* Sho', dey's miles an' miles behind. What yo' gittin' fidgetty about? *(But he sits down and begins to lace up his shoes in great haste, all the time muttering reassuringly.)* You know what? Yo' belly is empty, dat's what's de matter wid you. Come time to eat! Wid nothin' but wind on yo' stumach, o' course yo' feels jiggedy. Well, we eats right heah an' now soon's I gits dese pesky shoes laced up. *(He finishes lacing up his shoes.)* Dere! Now le's see! *(Gets on his hands and knees and searches the ground around him with his eyes.)* White stone, white stone, where is yo'? *(He sees the first white stone and crawls to it—with satisfaction.)* Heah yo' is! I knowed dis was de right place. Box of grub, come to me. *(He turns over the stone and feels in under it—in a tone of dismay)* Ain't heah! Gorry, is I in de right place or isn't I? Dere's 'nother stone. Guess dat's it. *(He scrambles to the next stone and turns it over.)* Ain't heah, neither! Grub, whar is yo'? Ain't heah. Gorry, has I got to go hungry into dem woods—all de night? *(While he is talking he scrambles from one stone to another, turning them over in frantic haste. Finally he jumps to his feet excitedly.)* Is I lost de place? Must have! But how dat happen when I was followin' de trail across de plain in broad daylight? *(Almost*

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plaintively) I'se hungry, I is! I gotta git my feed. Whar's my strength gonna come from if I doesn't? Gorrry, I gotta find dat grub high an' low somehow! Why it come dark so quick like dat? Can't see nothin'. (*He scratches a match on his trousers and peers about him. The rate of the beat of the far-off tom-tom increases perceptibly as he does so. He mutters in a bewildered voice.*) How come all dese white stones come heah when I only remembers one? (*Suddenly, with a frightened gasp, he flings the match on the ground and stamps on it.*) Nigger, is yo' gone crazy mad? Is you lightin' matches to show dem whar you is? Fo' Lawd's sake, use yo' haid. Gorrry, I'se got to be careful! (*He stares at the plain behind him apprehensively, his hand on his revolver.*) But how come all dese white stones? And whar's dat tin box o' grub I hid all wrapped up in oilcloth?

(While his back is turned, the Little Formless Fears creep out from the deeper blackness of the forest. They are black, shapeless; only their glittering little eyes can be seen. If they have any describable form at all it is that of a grub-worm about the size of a creeping child. They move noiselessly, but with deliberate, painful effort, striving to raise themselves on end, failing and sinking prone again. Jones turns about to face the forest. He stares up at the tops of the trees, seeking vainly to discover his whereabouts by their conformation.)

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Can't tell nothin' from dem trees! Gorrry, nothin' 'round heah look like I evah seed it befo'. I'se done lost de place sho' 'nuff! (*With mournful foreboding*) It's mighty queer! It's mighty queer! (*With sudden forced defiance—in an angry tone*) Woods, is yo' tryin' to put some-thin' ovah on me?

(From the formless creatures on the ground in front of him comes a tiny gale of low mocking laughter like a rustling of leaves. They squirm upward toward him in twisted attitudes. Jones looks down, leaps backward with a yell of terror, yanking out his revolver as he does so—in a quavering voice.)

What's dat? Who's dar? What's you? Git away from me befo' I shoots yo' up! Yo' don't?—

(He fires. There is a flash, a loud report, then silence, broken only by the far-off quickened throb of the tom-tom. The formless creatures have scurried back into the forest. Jones remains fixed in his position, listening intently. The sound of the shot, the reassuring feel of the revolver in his hand have somewhat restored his shaken nerve. He addresses himself with renewed confidence:)

Dey're gone. Dat shot fix 'em. Dey was only little animals—little wild pigs, I reckon. Dey've maybe rooted out yo' grub an' eat it. Sho', yo' fool nigger, what yo' think dey is—ha'nts?

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(*Excitedly*) Gorry, you give de game away when yo' fire dat shot. Dem niggers heah dat fo' su'tin! Time yo' beat it in de woods widout no long waits. (*He starts for the forest—hesitates before the plunge—then urging himself in with manful resolution.*) Git in, nigger! What yo' skeered at? Ain't nothin' dere but de trees! Git in! (*He plunges boldly into the forest.*)

SCENE THREE

(*Nine o'clock. In the forest. The moon has just risen. Its beams drifting through the canopy of leaves make a barely perceptible, suffused eerie glow. A dense low wall of underbrush and creepers is in the nearer foreground fencing in a small triangular clearing. Beyond this is the massed blackness of the forest like an encompassing barrier. A path is dimly discerned leading down to the clearing from left, rear, and winding away from it again toward the right. As the scene opens nothing can be distinctly made out. Except for the beating of the tom-tom, which is a trifle louder and quicker than in the previous scene, there is silence, broken every few seconds by a queer, clicking sound. Then gradually the figure of the negro Jeff can be discerned crouching on his haunches at the rear of the triangle. He is middle-aged, thin, brown in color, is dressed in a Pullman porter's uniform, cap, etc. He is throwing a pair of dice on the ground before him, picking them up, shaking them, cast-*

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ing them out with the regular, rigid, mechanical movements of an automaton. The heavy, plodding footsteps of some one approaching along the trail from the left are heard, and Jones' voice, pitched in a slightly higher key and strained in a cheering effort to overcome its own tremors.)

De moon's rizen. Does yo' heah dat, nigger? Yo' gits more light from dis out. No mo' buttin' yo' fool head agin' de trunks an' scratchin' de hide off yo' legs in de bushes. Now yo' sees whar yo'se gwine. So cheer up! From now on yo' has a snap. *(He steps just to the rear of the triangular clearing and mops off his face on his sleeve. He has lost his Panama hat. His face is scratched, his brilliant uniform shows several large rents.)* What time's it gittin' to be, I wonder? I dassent light no match to find out. Phoo'. It's wa'm, an' dat's a fac'! *(Wearily)* How long I been makin' tracks in dese woods? Must be hours an' hours. Seems like fo'evah! Yit can't be, when de moon's jes' riz. Dis am a long night fo' yo', yo' Majesty! *(With a mournful chuckle)* Majesty! Der ain't much majesty 'bout dis baby now. *(With attempted cheerfulness)* Never min'. It's all part o' de game. Dis night come to an end like everythin' else. An' when yo' gits dar safe an' has dat bankroll in yo' hands, yo' laughs at all dis. *(He starts to whistle, but checks himself abruptly.)* What yo' whistlin' for, yo' po' dope? Want all de worl' to heah

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what's been a-trippin' me up an' breakin' my neck. (*He unstraps and flings them away disgustedly.*) Dere! I gits rid o' dem frippety Emperor trappin's an' I travels lighter. Lawd! I'se tired! (*After a pause, listening to the insistent beat of the tom-tom in the distance.*) I must 'a put some distance between myself an' dem—runnin' like dat—an' yet—dat damn drum sound jes' de same—nearer, even. Well, I guess I a'most holds my lead, anyhow. Dey won't never kotch up. (*With a sigh*) If on'y my fool legs stands up. Oh, I'se sorry I evah went in for dis. Dat Emperor job is sho' hard to shake. (*He looks around him suspiciously.*) How'd dis road evah git heah? Good, level road, too. I never remembers seein' it befo'. (*Shaking his head apprehensively.*) Dese woods is sho' full o' de queerest things at night. (*With sudden terror*) Lawd God, don't let me see no more o' dem ha'nts. Dey gits my goat! (*Then trying to talk himself into confidence.*) Ha'nts! Yo' fool nigger, dey ain't no such things! Don't de Baptist parson tell you dat many time? Is yo' civilized, or is yo' like dese ign'rent black niggers heah? Sho'! Dat was all in yo' own head. Wasn't nothin' there! Wasn't no Jeff! Know what? Yo' jus' get seein' dem thing 'cause yo' belly's empty an' you's sick wid hunger inside. Hunger 'fects yo' head an' yo' eyes. Any fool know dat. (*Then pleading fervently*) But bless God, I don't come across no more o' dem, whatever dey is!

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(Then cautiously) Rest! Don't talk! Rest! You needs it. Den yo' gits on yo' way again. *(Looking at the moon)* Night's half gone a'most. Yo' hits de coast in de mawning! Den you'se all safe.

(From the right forward a small gang of negroes enter. They are dressed in striped convicts suits, their heads are shaven, one leg drags limpingly, shackled to a heavy ball and chain. Some carry picks, the others shovels. They are followed by a white man dressed in the uniform of a prison guard. A Winchester rifle is slung across his shoulders and he carries a heavy whip. At a signal from the guard they stop on the road opposite to where Jones is sitting. Jones, who has been staring up at the sky, unmindful of their noiseless approach, suddenly looks down and sees them. His eyes pop out, he tries to get to his feet and fly, but sinks back, too numbed by fright to move. His voice catches in a choking prayer.)

Lawd Jesus!

(The prison guard cracks his whip—noiselessly—and at that signal all the convicts start to work on the road. They swing their picks, they shovel, but not a sound comes from their labor. Their movements, like those of Jeff in the preceding scene, are those of automatons—rigid, slow, and mechanical. The prison guard points sternly at Jones with his whip, motions him to take his place among the other shovelers. Jones gets to

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his feet in a hypnotized stupor. He mumbles subserviently:)

Yes, suh! Yes, suh! I'se comin'!

(As he shuffles, dragging one foot, over to his place, he curses under his breath with rage and hatred.)

God damn yo' soul, I gits even wid yo' yit, sometime.

(As if there was a shovel in his hands, he goes through weary, mechanical gestures of digging up dirt and throwing it to the roadside. Suddenly the guard approaches him angrily, threateningly. He raises his whip and lashes Jones viciously across the shoulders with it. Jones winces with pain and cowers abjectly. The guard turns his back on him and walks away contemptuously. Instantly Jones straightens up. With arms up-raised, as if his shovel were a club in his hands, he springs murderously at the unsuspecting guard. In the act of crashing down his shovel on the white man's skull, Jones suddenly becomes aware that his hands are empty. He cries despairingly:)

Whar's my shovel? Gimme my shovel 'till I splits his damn head! *(Appealing to his fellow convicts)* Gimme a shovel, one o' yo' fo' God's sake!

(They stand fixed in motionless attitudes, their eyes on the ground. The guard seems to wait

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expectantly, his back turned to the attacker. Jones bellows with baffled terrified rage, tugging frantically at his revolver.)

I kills you, you white debil, if it's de last thing I evah does! Ghost or debil, I kill you agin!

(He frees the revolver and fires pointblank at the guard's back. Instantly the walls of the forest close in from both sides, the road and the figures of the convict gang are blotted out in an enshrouding darkness. The only sounds are a crashing in the underbrush as Jones leaps away in mad flight and the throbbing of the tom-tom, still far distant, but increased in volume of sound and rapidity of beat.)

SCENE FIVE

(One o'clock. A large circular clearing, enclosed by the serried ranks of lofty, gigantic trunks of tall trees whose tops are lost to view. In the center is a big dead stump, worn by time into a curious resemblance to an auction block. The moon floods the clearing with a clear light. Jones forces his way in through the forest on the left. He looks wildly about the clearing with hunted, fearful glances. His pants are in tatters, his shoes cut and misshapen, flapping about his feet. He slinks cautiously to the stump in the center and sits down in a tense position, ready for instant flight. Then he holds his head in his hands and

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rocks back and forth, moaning to himself miserably.)

Oh, Lawd, Lawd! Oh Lawd, Lawd! (*Suddenly he throws himself on his knees and raises his clasped hands to the sky—in a voice of agonized pleading.*) Lawd, Jesus, heah my prayer! I'se a poor sinner, a poor sinner! I knows I done wrong, I knows it! When I cotches Jeff cheatin' wid loaded dice my anger overcomes me an' I kills him dead! Lawd, I done wrong! When dat guard hits me wid de whip, my anger overcomes me, and I kills him dead. Lawd, I done wrong! An' down heah whar dese fool bush niggers raises me up to the seat o' de mighty, I steals all I could grab. Lawd, I done wrong! I knows it! I'se sorry! Forgive me, Lawd! Forgive dis po' sinner! (*Then beseeching terrifiedly*) An' keep dem away, Lawd! Keep dem away from me! An' stop dat drum soundin' in my ears! Dat begin to sound ha'nted, too. (*He gets to his feet, evidently slightly reassured by his prayer—with attempted confidence*) De Lawd'll preserve me from dem ha'nts after dis. (*Sits down on the stump again.*) I ain't skeered o' real men. Let dem come. But dem odders— (*He shudders—then looks down at his feet, working his toes inside the shoes—with a groan*) Oh, my po' feet! Dem shoes ain't no use no more 'ceptin' to hurt. I'se better off widout dem. (*He unlaces them and pulls them off—holds the wrecks of the*

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shoes in his hand and regards them mournfully.)
You was real A-one patin' leather, too. Look at yo' now. Emperor, you'se gittin' mighty low!

(He sighs dejectedly and remains with bowed shoulders, staring down at the shoes in his hands as if reluctant to throw them away. While his attention is thus occupied, a crowd of figures silently enter the clearing from all sides. All are dressed in Southern costumes of the period of the fifties of the last century. There are middle-aged men who are evidently well-to-do planters. There is one spruce, authoritative individual—the Auctioneer. There are a crowd of curious spectators, chiefly young belles and dandies who have come to the slave market for diversion. All exchange courtly greetings in dumb show and chat silently together. There is something stiff, rigid, unreal, marionettish about their movements. They group themselves about the stump. Finally a batch of slaves are led in from the left by an attendant—three men of different ages, two women, one with a baby in her arms, nursing. They are placed to the left of the stump, beside Jones.)

The white planters look them over appraisingly as if they were cattle, and exchange judgments on each. The dandies point with their fingers and make witty remarks. The belles titter bewitchingly. All this in silence save for the ominous throb of the tom-tom. The Auctioneer holds up his hand, taking his place at the stump. The

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groups strain forward attentively. He touches Jones on the shoulder peremptorily, motioning for him to stand on the stump—the auction block.

Jones looks up, sees the figures on all sides, looks wildly for some opening to escape, sees none, screams and leaps madly to the top of the stump to get as far away from them as possible. He stands there, cowering, paralyzed with horror. The Auctioneer begins his silent spiel. He points to Jones, appeals to the planters to see for themselves. Here is a good field hand, sound in wind and limb, as they can see. Very strong still, in spite of his being middle-aged. Look at that back. Look at those shoulders. Look at the muscles in his arms and his sturdy legs. Capable of any amount of hard labor. Moreover, of a good disposition, intelligent and tractable. Will any gentleman start the bidding? The planters raise their fingers, make their bids. They are apparently all eager to possess Jones. The bidding is lively, the crowd interested. While this has been going on, Jones has been seized by the courage of desperation. He dares to look down and around him. Over his face abject terror gives way to mystification, to gradual realization—stutteringly:)

What yo' all doin', white folks? What's all dis? What yo' all lookin' at me fo'? What yo' doin' wid me, anyhow? (Suddenly convulsed with raging hatred and fear) Is dis a auction? Is yo' sellin' me like dey uster befo' de war? (Jerking out his revolver just as the Auctioneer

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knocks him down to one of the planters—glaring from him to the purchaser) An' you sells me? An' you buys me? I shows you I'se a free nigger, damn yo' souls! (He fires at the Auctioneer and at the planter with such rapidity that the two shots are almost simultaneous. As if this were a signal, the walls of the forest fold in. Only blackness remains and silence broken by Jones as he rushes off, crying with fear—and by the quickened, ever louder beat of the tom-tom.)

SCENE SIX

(Three o'clock. A cleared space in the forest. The limbs of the trees meet over it, forming a low ceiling about five feet from the ground. The interlocked ropes of creepers reaching upward to entwine the tree trunks give an arched appearance to the sides. The space this encloses is like the dark, noisome hold of some ancient vessel. The moonlight is almost completely shut out and only a vague, wan light filters through. There is the noise of some one approaching from the left, stumbling and crawling through the undergrowth. Jones' voice is heard between chattering moans.)

Oh, Lawd, what I gwine do now? Ain't got no bullet left on'y de silver one. If mo' o' dem ha'nts come after me, how I gwine skeer dem away? Oh, Lawd, on'y de silver one left—an' I gotta save dat fo' luck. If I shoots dat one I'm a goner sho'! Lawd, it's black heah!

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Whar's de moon? Oh, Lawd, don't dis night evah come to an end? (*By the sounds he is feeling his way cautiously forward.*) Dere! Dis feels like a clear space. I gotta lie down an' rest. I don't care if dem niggers does catch me. I gotta rest.

(*He is well forward now where his figure can be dimly made out. His pants have been so torn away that what is left of them is no better than a breech cloth. He flings himself full length, face downward on the ground, panting with exhaustion. Gradually it seems to grow lighter in the enclosed space, and two rows of seated figures can be seen behind Jones. They are sitting in crumpled, despairing attitudes, hunched facing one another, with their backs touching the forest walls as if they were shackled to them. All are negroes, naked save for loin cloths. At first they are silent and motionless. Then they begin to sway slowly forward toward each other and back again in unison, as if they were laxly letting themselves follow the long roll of a ship at sea. At the same time, a low, melancholy murmur rises among them, increasing gradually by rhythmic degrees, which seem to be directed and controlled by the throb of the tom-tom in the distance, to a long, tremendous wail of despair that reaches a certain pitch, unbearably acute, then falls by slow gradations of tone into silence and is taken up again. Jones starts, looks up, sees the figures, and throws himself down again to shut out the sight. A shudder*

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of terror shakes his whole body as the wail rises up about him again. But the next time, his voice, as if under some uncanny compulsion, starts with the others. As their chorus lifts he rises to a sitting posture similar to the others, swaying back and forth. His voice reaches the highest pitch of sorrow, of desolation. The light fades out, the other voices cease, and only darkness is left. Jones can be heard scrambling to his feet and running off, his voice sinking down the scale and receding as he moves farther and farther away in the forest. The tom-tom beats louder, quicker, with a more insistent, triumphant pulsation.)

SCENE SEVEN

(Five o'clock. The foot of a gigantic tree by the edge of a great river. A rough structure of boulders like an altar is by the tree. The raised river bank is in the nearer background. Beyond this the surface of the river spreads out brilliant and unruffled in the moonlight, blotted out and merged into a veil of bluish mist in the distance. Jones' voice is heard from the left, rising and falling in the long, despairing wail of the chained slaves, to the rhythmic beat of the tom-tom. As his voice sinks into silence he enters the open space. The expression of his face is fixed and stony, his eyes have an obsessed glare, he moves with a strange deliberation like a sleep-walker or one in a trance. He looks around at the tree, the rough stone altar, the moonlit surface of the river beyond, and passes

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his hand over his head with a vague gesture of puzzled bewilderment. Then, as if in obedience to some obscure impulse, he sinks into a kneeling, devotional posture before the altar. Then he seems to come to himself partly, to have an uncertain realization of what he is doing, for he straightens up and stares about him horrified—in an incoherent mumble.)

What—what is I doin'? What is—dis place? Seems like—seems like I know dat tree—an' dem stones—an' de river. I remember—seems like I been heah befo'. (Tremblingly) Oh, Gorry, I'se skeered in dis place! I'se skeered! Oh, Lawd, pertect dis sinner!

(Crawling away from the altar, he cowers close to the ground, his face hidden, his shoulders heaving with sobs of hysterical fright. From behind the trunk of the tree, as if he had sprung out of it, the figure of the Congo witch-doctor appears. He is wizened and old, naked except for the fur of some small animal tied about his waist, its bushy tail hanging down in front. His body is stained all over a bright red. Antelope horns are on each side of his head, branching upward. In one hand he carries a bone rattle, in the other a charm stick with a bunch of white cockatoo feathers tied to the end. A great number of glass beads and bone ornaments are about his neck, ears, wrists, and ankles. He struts noiselessly with a queer prancing step to a position in the clear ground between Jones and

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the altar. Then with a preliminary, summoning stamp of his foot on the earth, he begins to dance and to chant. As if in response to his summons the beating of the tom-tom grows to a fierce, exultant boom whose throbs seem to fill the air with vibrating rhythm. Jones looks up, starts to spring to his feet, reaches a half-kneeling, half-squatting position, and remains rigidly fixed there, paralyzed with awed fascination by this new apparition. The witch-doctor sways, stamping with his foot, his bone rattle clicking the time. His voice rises and falls in a weird, monotonous croon, without articulate word division. Gradually his dance becomes clearly one of a narrative in pantomime, his croon is an incantation, a charm to allay the fierceness of some implacable deity demanding sacrifice. He flees, he is pursued by devils, he hides, he flees again. Ever wilder and wilder becomes his flight, nearer and nearer draws the pursuing evil, more and more the spirit of terror gains possession of him. His croon, rising to intensity, is punctuated by shrill cries. Jones has become completely hypnotized. His voice joins in the incantation, in the cries; he beats time with his hands and sways his body to and fro from the waist. The whole spirit and meaning of the dance has entered into him, has become his spirit. Finally the theme of the pantomime halts, on a howl of despair, and is taken up again in a note of savage hope. There is a salvation. The forces of evil demand sacrifice. They must be appeased. The witch-doctor points with his wand to the

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sacred tree, the river beyond, to the altar, and finally to Jones with a ferocious command. Jones seems to sense the meaning of this. It is he who must offer himself for sacrifice. He beats his forehead abjectly to the ground, moaning hysterically.) Mercy, Oh Lawd! Mercy! Mercy on dis po' sinner!

(The witch-doctor springs to the river bank. He stretches out his arms and calls to some god within its depths. Then he starts backward slowly, his arms remaining out. A huge head of a crocodile appears over the bank and its eyes, glittering greenly, fastens upon Jones. He stares into them fascinatedly. The witch-doctor prances up to him, touches him with his wand, motions with hideous command toward the waiting monster. Jones squirms on his belly nearer and nearer, moaning continually:)

Mercy, Lawd! Mercy!

(The crocodile heaves more of his enormous hulk onto the land. Jones squirms toward him. The witch-doctor's voice shrills out in furious exultation, the tom-tom beats madly. Jones cries out in fierce, exhausted spasms of anguished pleading:)

Lawd, save me! Lawd Jesus, heah my prayer!

(Immediately, in answer to his prayer, comes the thought of the one bullet left him. He snatches at his hip, shouting defiantly:)

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De silver bullet! Yo' don't git me yit!

(He fires at the green eyes in front of him. The head of the crocodile sinks back behind the river bank, the witch-doctor springs behind the sacred tree and disappears. Jones lies with his face to the ground, his arms outstretched, whimpering with fear as the throb of the tom-tom fills the silence about him with a somber pulsation, a baffled but revengeful power.)

SCENE EIGHT

(Dawn. Same as Scene Two, the dividing line of forest and plain. The nearest tree trunks are dimly revealed, but the forest behind them is still a mass of glooming shadow. The tom-tom seems on the very spot, so loud and continuously vibrating are its beats. Lem enters from the left, followed by a small squad of his soldiers, and by the Cockney trader, Smithers. Lem is a heavy-set, ape-faced old savage of the extreme African type, dressed only in a loin cloth. A revolver and cartridge belt are about his waist. His soldiers are in different degrees of rag-concealed nakedness. All wear broad palm leaf hats. Each one carries a rifle. Smithers is the same as in Scene One. One of the soldiers, evidently a tracker, is peering about keenly on the ground. He grunts and points to the spot where Jones entered the forest. Lem and Smithers come to look.)

SMITHERS *(after a glance, turns away in disgust.)*

That's where 'e went in right enough. Much

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good it'll do yer. 'E's miles orf by this an' safe to the coast, damn 'is 'ide! I tole yer ye'd lose 'im, didn't I?—wastin' the 'ole bloomin' night beatin' yer bloody drum and castin' yer silly spells! Gawd blimey, wot a pack!

LEM (*gutterally*)

We kotch him. You see. (*He makes a motion to his soldiers, who squat down on their haunches in a semi-circle.*)

SMITHERS (*exasperatedly*)

Well, ain't yer goin' in an' 'unt 'im in the woods? What the 'ell's the good of waitin'?

LEM (*imperturbably—squatting down himself*)

We kotch him.

SMITHERS (*turning away from him contemptuously*)

Aw! Garn! 'E's a better man than the lot o' you put together. I 'ates the sight o' 'im, but I'll say that for 'im.

(*A sound of snapping twigs comes from the forest. The soldiers jump to their feet, cocking their rifles alertly. Lem remains sitting with an imperturbable expression, but listening intently. The sound from the woods is repeated. Lem makes a quick signal with his hand. His followers creep quickly but noiselessly into the forest, scattering so that each enters at a different spot.*)

SMITHERS (*in the silence that follows—in a contemptuous whisper*)

You ain't thinkin' that would be 'im, I 'ope?

LEM (*calmly*)

We kotch him.

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SMITHERS

Blarsted fat 'eads! (*Then after a second's thought—wonderingly*) Still an' all, it might happen. If 'e lost 'is bloody way in these stinkin' woods 'e'd likely turn in a circle without 'is knowin' it. They all does.

LEM (*peremptorily*)

S-s-s-h-h!

(*The report of several rifles sounds from the forest, followed a second later by savage, exultant yells. The beating of the tom-tom abruptly ceases. Lem looks up at the white man with a grin of satisfaction.*)

We kotch him. Him dead.

SMITHERS (*with a snarl*)

'Ow d'yer know it's 'im an' 'ow d'yer know 'e's dead?

LEM

My men's dey got 'um silver bullets. Dey kill him shore.

SMITHERS (*astonished*)

They got silver bullets?

LEM

Lead bullet no kill him. He got um strong charm. I took um money, make um silver bullet, make um strong charm, too.

SMITHERS (*light breaking upon him*)

So that's wot you was up to all night, wot? You was scared to put after 'im till you'd molded silver bullets, eh?

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LEM (*simply stating a fact*)

Yes. Him got strong charm. Lead no good.

SMITHERS (*slapping his thigh and guffawing*)

Haw-haw! If yer don't beat al 'ell! (*Then recovering himself—scornfully*) I'll bet you it ain't 'im they shot at all, yer bleedin' looney!

LEM (*calmly*)

Dey come bring him now.

(*The soldiers come out of the forest, carrying Jones' limp body. There is a little reddish-purple hole under his left breast. He is dead. They carry him to Lem, who examines his body with great satisfaction. Smithers leans over his shoulder—in a tone of frightened awe:*)

Well, they did for yer right enough, Jonesy, me lad! Dead as a 'erring! (*Mockingly*) Where's yer 'igh an' mighty airs now, yer bloomin' Majesty? (*Then with a grin*) Silver bullets! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the 'eight o' style, any'ow!

(*Lem makes a motion to the soldiers to carry the body out left. Smithers speaks to him sneeringly*)

SMITHERS

And I s'pose you think it's yer bleedin' charms and yer silly beatin' the drum that made 'im run in a circle when 'e'd lost 'imself, don't yer? (*But Lem makes no reply, does not seem to hear the question, walks out left after his men. Smithers looks after him with contemptuous scorn.*) Stupid as 'ogs, the lot of 'em! Blarsted niggers!

CURTAIN FALLS

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE SCREEN VERSION OF "THE EMPEROR JONES"

I. LITERARY SOURCE AND PRODUCTION

On what drama is the film *The Emperor Jones* based? What is there unusual about the title? Who is Eugene O'Neill? Who is DuBose Heyward? Who directed the film? Who played the star part? Mention some interesting facts about each. Mention the producers.

2. MUSICAL ELEMENTS

What part do musical elements play in the film? Why does this drama lend itself to musical treatment? What is the effect of the gradual acceleration of the thumping of the tom-toms as Jones struggles frantically through the forest? Who recently made an opera of *The Emperor Jones*? Who played the leading rôle?

3. CINEMATIC TREATMENT

How does the film open? How does O'Neill's stage play open? Does the film version cover a longer period of action than the stage play? Is the running time of the film any longer than that of the stage play? What has Heyward done with the time-scheme of the story? What is the general effect of this treatment?

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4. PHOTOGRAPHY

Numerous *dissolves* occur in the film. What is this device? What is gained by it? What use is made of close-ups in this film? What is the purpose of this device? What scenes impressed you from the standpoint of pictorial effect?

5. CHARACTERIZATION

What kind of man is Brutus Jones at the beginning of the story? How is his character described before he appears? What is he doing when he first appears on the screen? Why did O'Neill give him the name Brutus, do you suppose? What are his outstanding personality traits? What episodes bring out his striking traits? What, for example, shows his vanity at the start? What shows his vanity as an emperor? At what point in the story do you sympathize with him most? What are the fatal defects in his character? At what point does he begin to go to pieces? Describe his recession to savage fear and superstition. What difference, if any, can you point out between the Jones of the film and the Jones of the play? Are the film and stage play identical so far as basic points are concerned in relation to characterization? Comment on Jones' dictum: "Look heah, white man. Dere's little stealin', like yo' does and dere's big stealin' like ah does, an' for little stealin' dey kicks you in jail sooner or later but for big stealin' dey makes you Emperor and puts you in de Hall of Fame when yo' croaks."

6. STORY STRUCTURE

What are the dramatic steps that lead to Jones' murder of his friend and fellow-partner, Jeff? Compare these

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steps with those leading to Macbeth's murder of his friend and fellow-general, Banquo. What is the consequence of this act of murder? What steps lead to the murder of the chain-gang guard? Is this desperate act well motivated? What is the consequence of the second murder? By what steps does Jones gain the ascendancy over Lem and Smithers? What are the steps in the disintegration of Jones after he becomes a petty despot?

7. USE OF CONTRAST AND COMPARISON

What are some striking examples of contrast in character, locale, and incident in the film? How would you compare Brutus Jones with each of the three white men in the film version?

8. HUMOR AND IRONY

What humorous touches are there in the film? What is the function of humor in a tragedy? What are some ironical touches in the film? Wherein lies its basic irony?

9. SOME ADDITIONAL COMPARISONS BETWEEN "MACBETH" AND "THE EMPEROR JONES"

Compare the two plays as studies of vaulting ambition that o'erleaps itself. Have the stories of Macbeth and Jones any lesson for ordinary human beings? Has Smithers somewhat the same function as the witches in Shakespeare's play? What part do prophecies play in the two plays? Compare the two plays as examples of Elizabethan and modern stagecraft respectively.

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10. ADDITIONAL THOUGHT QUESTIONS

What, in your judgment, is the most powerful scene? Is any part of the play not clear? Explain. What are some odd superstitions revealed in the play? Have you yourself witnessed the workings of any of these superstitions? Does the film version reveal the greatness of O'Neill as a dramatist? Would you conclude from the photoplay that he is our foremost living dramatist? Explain. Was the fact that the original play by O'Neill was cast in the form of a series of episodes a help or a hindrance in making the screen version? Why did producers hesitate about producing the photoplay? What other plays by O'Neill have been produced on the screen? What plays by him not as yet given as photoplays would you like to see so given? Do you sympathize with Jones? Do you know people like him? Do you personally resemble him in any way? In which aspect does Paul Robeson seem greater—as singer or as actor? Why may Negroes take pride in this film version of the great play by O'Neill?

KEY TO THE STUDY GUIDE

I. LITERARY SOURCE AND PRODUCTION

The film is based on a fine stage play by Eugene O'Neill, produced originally in 1920. DuBose Heyward, himself a dramatist of note, co-author of *Porgy*, wrote the scenario. The film was produced by Krimsky-Cochran, a new independent firm. Dudley Murphy was the director. Paul Robeson, who once acted in the stage play, is starred in the film. He is a Rutgers graduate and is noted as a singer as well as an actor.

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2. MUSICAL ELEMENTS

Music is used almost throughout the film to intensify its mood and atmosphere. The music ranges from spirituals (Walk Right In An' Sit Down; O, I Want Two Wings; Now Let Me Fly; Same Train) to the barbaric rhythm of tom-toms. In January, 1933, Louis Gruenberg's operatic version of the play was produced at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, with Lawrence Tibbett as Jones.

3. CINEMATIC TREATMENT

The film opens with a close-up of a drum which dissolves into a savage ceremony of negroes dancing in a circle to the sound of tom-toms. The bare feet then dissolve into shod feet moving in similar rhythm inside a negro church. The congregation is praying for Jones and honoring him as a faithful young member of the flock who is leaving for a fine job as a Pullman porter. The religious opening is an artistic touch which becomes apparent at Jones' final recession to religion and the fear of God.

The stage play begins with Jones as Emperor, a middle-aged man, and the action covers a single night in which Jones gives hints of the past twenty years of his life. The running time of the film is no longer than that of the play, but it covers about twenty years in chronological sequence instead of a single night. Heyward interestingly describes his method of adapting the O'Neill work to the screen:

This job presented a rather unusual problem for the adaptor. What it required was a piece of straight creative writing which would preface the play, and which, when completed, would merge with the play without any break or jolt in story or characterization.

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I first analyzed O'Neill's play, especially the opening scene with Jones and Smithers, and from what scraps of background thrown out in the exposition that he gave me I constructed a framework of Jones' early life. To this framework I added the character of the earlier Jones, as I had imagined it, and by throwing this character into contact with the disintegrating power of our white civilization, broke Jones down from the rather simple Southern Negro to the shrewd, grafting Negro of the play. I rather enjoyed making him a black counterpart of our own big business pirate. The incidents which I used in the early part of the screen play, I either got from O'Neill's exposition, or built in to reveal character under action, or to lend the swift inevitable progression so necessary to a screen story.

The effect of this treatment was ably reviewed by the photoplay critic of the *New York Sun*:

The first half of the film is DuBose Heyward, and the second half is O'Neill. In other words, the play, proper, does not commence until about the middle of the film. The first half traces Brutus Jones' adventures in the United States, his adventures as Pullman porter, his Harlem pleasure jaunts, his gambling ventures and his sojourn in a chain gang prior to fleeing the United States. The second half is, more or less, unadulterated O'Neill. The first half is done for the sake of pictorial variety.

To say whether it helps or hurts, one has only to think of the lack of pictorial variety had *The Emperor Jones* commenced where the play begins. It might easily have been so pictorially monotonous—what with nothing but jungle, no light and shade—that it might have considerably hurt the dramatic values of the O'Neill monologues. The movies, it might be best to add at this exceptionally late date, are still primarily a pictorial medium. Playing all of *The Emperor Jones* in the dark recesses of that West Indian forest of night might have resulted in as oppressive a photoplay as one transpiring entirely in a dugout.

True, the effect of *The Emperor Jones* is now a bit different from that of the play. It lacks the latter's concentrated power. Yet the cinematic values obtained from shifting from the South to Harlem, to the stokehold of a ship and to a chain gang—and finally to several exceptionally imaginative and colorful

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scenes of the court of the Emperor's West Indian palace—are not to be denied.

The film thus resolves itself into the tragic life-story of a Negro rather than a concentrated psychological study in racial fear, a concentrated study of the crumbling of an arrogant Negro's mind as West Indian semisavages pursue him through the jungle with ominous and ever nearing tom-toms.

4. PHOTOGRAPHY

A *dissolve* is a gradual change of one scene into another, made by lapping the fade-out of the one on the fade-in of the other. If accomplished by double exposure or double printing on the same strip of film, this is known as a lap-dissolve. The device, as used in this film about twenty-five times, serves to make quick transitions, so as to speed up the action of the story. The initial dissolve of the drum has the effect of an overture, which promptly strikes the keynote of the photoplay. In the Pullman scenes, the dissolves show the rapid transitions to stations on the Washington-to-Savannah run. The director has used musical as well as pictorial dissolves. For example, after the murder, the sound of the policeman's whistle dissolves into the singing of the chain gang.

A series of close-ups of various members of the negro congregation at the opening of the film serves to emphasize the respect all have for Jones. In the fight with Jeff, the sudden close-up of Jeff's hand as it draws the "button" knife from his pocket and springs it open gives dramatic emphasis to the element of greatest interest at the crisis. Other striking close-ups are of Jones' face as he suddenly decides to swim to the jungle island, and later as his hand grips the shoulder of Lem's cheating treasurer. A classic discussion of the close-up may be found in Münsterberg's *The Photoplay* (Chapter IV, "Attention").

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5. CHARACTERIZATION

The good character of young Brutus Jones is emphasized at the start by the shouts of the negro preacher and the church brethren: "He ain't like de prodigal, he ain't shif'less, he ain't puffed up, he ain't vainglorious." When we see him in the cabin with Dolly, preening himself before the mirror and humming a spiritual, the effect of her rapt adoration is to put him on a pedestal. His great historic name of Brutus lends a touch of idealism to his personality. His landing the Pullman job fires his imagination and he visualizes himself being congratulated by the President of the United States. His personality is vivid and he is ambitious from the start. He is thrilled when Jeff leads him to expect "big money" in tips. He makes quick decisions in crises. He becomes a forceful man who knows what he wants and who goes after it.

6. STORY STRUCTURE

The steps leading to the murder of Jeff and the escape to the island:

(1) Pleasure-bent at Harlem parties, he appropriates Jeff's sweetheart, Undine. (2) Because of his winning personality, he is transferred to the President's private car and gains an advantage over his friend, Jeff. (3) Because of his alertness, he absorbs inside information about a financial merger while on the private car and is invited to invest his savings in a profitable pool. (4) When Undine sneers at his story of participating in the pool and offends his pride, he abruptly abandons her. (5) Undine stirs up trouble when, accompanied by Jeff, she meets Jones and another woman at a cabaret. She arouses Jeff's jealousy of Jones and starts a fight with Jones' companion. Jones dodges the mêlée and quickly checks out, but the suspicion of Jeff remains. (6) In a gambling house in Savannah, Jeff cheats Jones with loaded dice and then tries to kill his former friend, but Jones overpowers him and kills

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Jeff in self-defense. (7) Jones, after ten ambitious years as a Pullman porter, suddenly finds himself a murderer. He becomes a member of a Georgia chain gang. (8) When a prison guard brutally cuts Jones with a whip because he refuses to whip a Negro boy who has fallen exhausted from a sweat-box, Jones revolts against ten years of terrorism, kills the guard with a shovel, and escapes. (9) From the stokehold of a West Indian boat, Jones, making a sudden decision, swims ashore to a jungle island. (10) Outwitting the tribal chief and a British trader, he becomes Emperor of the island.

The steps by which Jones gains the ascendancy over Lem and Smithers:

(1) Smithers buys Jones as a servant for \$5.00. (2) Jones acquires a stock of goods through gambling with the natives. (3) Smithers is forced to take Jones in as a partner. (4) Jones boldly reveals to Chief Lem that Smithers is a cheat. (5) In the excitement that follows, Lem's soldiers shoot at Jones, but he remains unhurt, because he has secretly placed blank cartridges in the guns. (6) Jones declares he is invulnerable except to silver bullets. The natives believe him and make him their chief. He throws Lem out and tells Smithers to call him "Emperor Jones." (7) Smithers furnishes the "palace" with many mirrors and rich red hangings.

The steps in the disintegration of Jones after he becomes a petty despot:

(1) Jones overtaxes the natives. (2) He orders six natives burned for beating up an "officer of the Crown." (3) The retainers all desert Jones and gather in the forest for an attack on him. He quickly decides to escape to the other side of the island and take a boat for Europe where he has his money in a bank. (4) He has with him a revolver containing five lead bullets and a silver one as a "charm." (5) As the sound of the tom-toms of the natives starts, he plunges into the forest. (6) His first disappointment is at not finding the white stone where he has hidden food. (7) Tormented by hallucinations of formless fears, he shoots at the air. (8) Weary and footsore, he discards his hat, his fine coat, his patent leather shoes. (9) He is tormented by visions of Jeff,

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of the guard he killed, and of a slave auctioneer. He discharges his pistol at the visions and they disappear. Only his silver bullet remains. (10) He shouts his repentance and begs God to forgive him for his sins. (11) He sees a vision of a tribal witch doctor who demands him as a sacrifice to a crocodile. (12) He fires the silver bullet at the specter of the crocodile. (13) He staggers back to the place he started from, where he meets a volley of silver bullets from Lem's men.

7. USE OF CONTRAST AND COMPARISON

Some of the contrasts are between the early integrity and the later disintegration of Jones, between the music of the spirituals and the beating of the tom-toms, between Jones in the chain-gang and on his throne, between Jones' prompt demonstration of his power as he assembles his gorgeous court and delivers doom and the ominous silence when later he strikes the gong thrice to no avail; between the splendid costume he wears on entering the forest and his rags the next morning.

The three white men in the film—Harrington, a corrupt financier; Smithers, a corrupt trader; and the brutal prison guard—present opportunities for subtle comparisons with Jones. Compared to them, he compels sympathy.

8. HUMOR AND IRONY

The opening scenes are done with mingled humor and pathos. The first scene on the Pullman is a humorous comparison of the shoes of the passengers—a sporty pair, a run-down pair, a stylish pair—with Jeff teaching Jones how to land tips. As the story progresses, Jones is consistently full of esprit, but the cheerful note is ironically lost in the tragic crescendo of fear and disintegration.





